NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

THE bulletin

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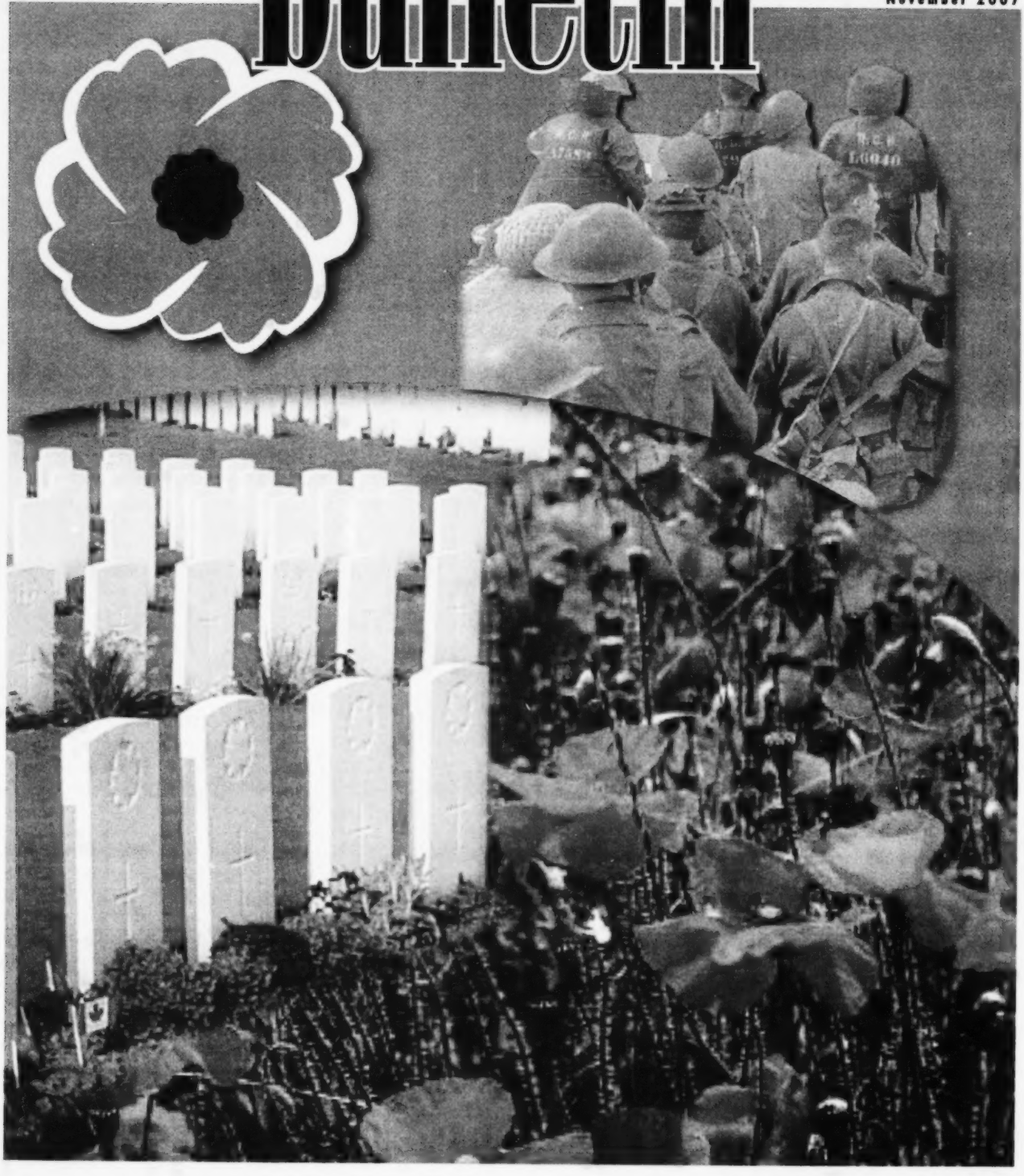

Up Front from the President

Throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, teachers, their families and in some cases our NLTA Branches, have placed wreaths at memorials and cenotaphs on the 11th of November. Over the years and with your guidance, our students have written moving poetry and prose, have created brilliant and meaningful artwork and have participated in concerts, contests and Remembrance Day Assemblies. Each year, Legionnaires and of course our beloved veterans, help us to reflect on the many aspects of war and peace through the modern era and from around the world.

This coming Remembrance Day and for the first time in the history of the NLTA, we will be placing a wreath at the National War Memorial in St. John's. Our desire to honor the men and women, both past and present, who have served to protect the peace and freedoms that we so fully enjoy, has undoubtedly been always heartfelt and steadfast. This ceremony will now provide teachers with official and annual NLTA representation and thus the opportunity for the Association to offer our genuine respect and sincere gratitude on a provincial level. We also hope to be present on your behalf, at the Provincial Ceremony on July 1 for Newfoundland and Labrador Memorial Day.

Having new occasions to pay tribute to the men and women who gave so freely and completely of themselves is surely gratifying for all educators. Many of our parents, relatives and friends have served in the armed forces and it is only fitting that we be represented at such provincial gatherings.

We are fortunate to live where and how we do. We thrive, for the most part, in a peace-loving land where liberty and democracy abide side by side. While our society and system of government is not perfect, it is the best that is out there in the world community. As Winston Churchill so eloquently put it on November 11, 1947, "Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

When we have paused to think of the injustices that occur in our world and the tragedy that often befalls so many people, we have often been motivated to seek some form of social redress, some remedy for those less fortunate. Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and the Foster Parents Plan are clear examples of some very worthy responses. Teachers have often led the charge in these organizations, which should be of no surprise to anyone, least of all teachers themselves. The universal right to a basic education has long been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and various other national and international bodies. The universal human right of children to a basic education and the parallel right of teachers to freely instruct is still a daunting challenge in many parts of the world. Consequently, there are educational organizations that do exist whose mission, in part, is to promote an accessible and quality education for all.

Canadian teachers, through the Canadian Teachers' Federation, have assisted their colleagues in advancing the quality of education across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. The CTF international programs include the critical elements of strengthening access to basic education for children, teacher professional development, gender equity and empowerment of women, and HIV/AIDS education. An emerging focus area is in the realm of supporting and promoting the education rights of girls that have been denied in many third world countries.

We have reason to be proud of the contributions of our CTF colleagues in the Project Overseas Program, many of whom have been teachers from this province. We seem to have always had more than our fair share of teachers volunteer to participate in these programs, as we have always had such strong representation in the military in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Please take sufficient time to fully recognize the Remembrance Day weekend with your families and friends. May it be a happy and peaceful few days and may this extend into the remainder of the year. Our veterans of yesterday and soldiers of today would certainly hope that it would be so.

And thank you all so much for your contributions to the students in your care.

Sean

THE
bulletin

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PROVINCIAL/NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

NEWS

SPANIARD'S BAY

Holy Redeemer School welcomes St. Peter's

Our Home is Your Home – this was the theme which resonated throughout Holy Redeemer School in Spaniard's Bay on September 5 as students, parents, and staff of St. Peter's School in Upper Island Cove enjoyed a wonderful orientation session at their new temporary location.

Parents and students were escorted on a tour throughout the building on September 5 as they visited classrooms and other general areas throughout the school in preparation for the students first day of school on September 6. During those first few school days, students from both schools quickly settled into the daily school routine.

Holy Redeemer School Principal, Mr. Doug Adams, was very pleased with the positive response by all involved in the process and noted the success of the transition was a result of great team work by all stakeholders including staff of both schools as well as school councils, parents, and school district personnel. Mr. Adams also noted that traditionally, both schools have shared many connections and are both members of the same family of schools within the Eastern School District organization.

Students, parents and staff of St. Peter's School in Upper Island Cove receive an orientation session for their new temporary stay at Holy Redeemer School.

ST. JOHN'S

Beaconsfield goes bananas

On September 28, the students and teachers at Beaconsfield Junior High School in St. John's decided to promote "Healthy Living" in a unique way. Students and staff were treated to complimentary bananas for their recess snack. The entire school went bananas. One of the students said that he didn't really like bananas. Whenever his mom put one in his lunch, he usually traded it with one of his friends for some other food or he would just give it away. When asked what he'll do in future, he said, "I won't be doing that – bananas are great!" Even the teachers who were a little skeptical seemed to have a change of heart. Bananas for recess were a hit. Living healthy and promoting healthy food choices is a mandate for Beaconsfield Junior High and this was an example of one small thing that can help promote this idea.

Grade 7 students at Beaconsfield Junior High "go bananas" over their healthy food choice.

To coincide with the healthy living aspect of this initiative, all the students and staff walked from the school to Bowring Park and back again. The 30-minute walk seemed to not only promote staying healthy, but also proved to be tons of fun for those involved. One of the Grade 9 students said that everyone was smiling, laughing and having fun while being healthy at the same time. The "healthy living commotion" 30-minute walked really showed the staff and students that you don't have to be an athlete or a

member of a gym to promote being healthy. To quote another Grade 9 student: "All you have to do is go on a walk with some friends and you can have lots of fun while being healthy."

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Equity Issues in Education Committee Highlights

The 2005-07 Equity Issues in Education Committee, one of the many standing committees of the NLTA, was successful during its two-year mandate in finding ways and means of providing greater representation of women in the leadership of the Association. The committee, chaired by Paul Pinsent and based in Stephenville, consisted of members Dara Best-Pinsent, Jeffrey Blundon, Lynn Froude, Norma Jean Kuta, Glenn MacArthur and Peter Sutherland.

Some highlights of the work of the committee included: improvements to child care while on NLTA business, from a maximum of $45 per day to payment of minimum wage/hour to a maximum of $80 per day for a 24-hour period; "child" care was renamed "dependent" care and is now defined as "children up to age 16 or for dependents over the age of 16 who are physically or mentally infirm, who reside in the member's home, who are normally dependent on the member, and for whom the member is responsible for providing care in his/her absence while on business for the NLTA".

Other work of the committee included a new policy on gender identity and sexual orientation, a poster to highlight the imbalance of the number of women in the profession and those in leadership, and the "Let's Teach About Women" project.

The 2007-09 Equity Issues in Education Committee is chaired by Jackie Maloney and will meet in the Burin-Marystown area.

Feedback sought from teachers of sexual health education

Melody Morton-Ninomiya, an M.Ed. candidate, is researching the views, comfort and feelings of teachers who cover Grades 7-9 sexual health education. She is interested in getting feedback through a questionnaire or an interview. All contacts will be strictly confidential. If you are interested in participating, please contact Melody Morton-Ninomiya, Tel: (709) 722-9492, melodym@mun.ca.

NLTA AWARDS 2007-08

Each year your Association honours several of its members with four prestigious awards. Please take a moment to read about them. If you feel that someone within your school qualifies for nomination for one of these awards for the 2007-08 school year, please contact your school representative who will forward the name and information on this person to your branch president or the appropriate special interest council president.

Special Recognition Award

This award was instituted by Johnson Incorporated to recognize the 100th Anniversary of the NLTA. It is presented annually to an active or life member of the Association who, while a teacher in the province, has made a major contribution to the **cultural, social and/or community life** of Newfoundland and Labrador. The award recognizes contributions in the areas of the arts (music/literature/visual arts), community service, and/or municipal politics. Nominations must come from branches or special interest councils and must be **received at the NLTA Office by January 15th**.

Allan Bishop Award

This Award was also established during the NLTA Centennial Year to recognize outstanding service to NLTA at the **provincial** level and it is named after former NLTA President and long-time staff member, Allan Bishop. The award is open to any active or life member of the Association, except that current members of the Provincial Executive are ineligible for the award and a provincial past president is ineligible for the award within three years of his/her presidency. Nominations must come from branches or special interest councils and must be **received at the NLTA Office by January 15th.**

Bancroft Award

This award, named in honour of James Frederick Bancroft, the first president of the NLTA, was established in 1980 during the 90th anniversary of the Association. The award was established to recognize the outstanding service given to **branches** by the dedicated and talented teachers whose efforts have helped make NLTA the strong association it is today. Nominations must come from branches and must be **received at the NLTA Office by January 15th**.

Barnes Award

This award was established in 1987 and is named for Dr. Arthur Barnes, a long-time supporter of the Association, who, in 1920, became the first Minister of Education. The award was established to recognize outstanding professional development services provided by teachers at the special interest council level. Nominations must come from special interest councils or branches and must be **received at the NLTA Office by January 15th**.

NL Council for Exceptional Children Outstanding Achievement Award 2007

The Newfoundland and Labrador Council for Exceptional Children promotes excellence in educational and community services for children with special needs and their families. In keeping with this goal, nominations are now being accepted for the annual Outstanding Achievement Award. This award is designed to acknowledge "outstanding contribution to the well-being of exceptional children and youth; innovation of teaching strategies; dedication to the integration of exceptional children; dedication to the creation of positive learning environments; and an ability to inspire students and co-workers". The award is designed to acknowledge the caliber of excellence for which our province is strongly recognized.

Individuals interested in nominating a local educator/practitioner are asked to contact Dr. Wayne Nesbit, CEC Awards Committee Chair (wnesbit@mun.ca), to obtain details and nomination forms. Nominations must be submitted by December 30, 2007.

Sexual Health Conference call for proposals

Attention teachers, administrators and guidance counselors. Next May 13-14, the Newfoundland & Labrador Sexual Health Centre will be having the first ever conference on Sexual Health held in this province. The Centre would love to have a strong presence from the education sector and are asking teachers to consider sending a proposal to speak at the event. Topic ideas? Sexual Health in the School System, Sexual Health in Rural Areas, the list is endless. They would love to have your expertise. For additional information contact Karen Moores, Conference Coordinator, Tel: 709-579-1009 or email: Karen.m@nlsexualhealthcentre.org.

CANADA

Building Futures Network

The Canadian Foundation for Economic Education (CFEE) is inviting you to join with other individuals and organizations across Canada as part of the new Building Futures Network. This Network will seek to link and support those who are in a position to help Canadians with their savings activities – most particularly, saving for children's post-secondary education and training. The Building Futures Website will have two sections – one for individual Canadians looking for help – and one for Members of the Network. The site will offer information, links, tools, news, and more. CFEE wants the site to be a gathering and connection point for those looking for help with saving – and those who are able to help.

There is no cost to join this Network. It is being funded by the Government of Canada – and specifically Human Resources and Social Development Canada. If you would like to join the Network of those who are trying to make a difference in the lives of many Canadians – and the futures of many young people – please visit the site and register as a member. The web address is www.buildingfuturesnetwork.com. There you will see what the network is currently offering in terms of support and assistance, and what it hopes to offer as site development continues. Please join with the CFEE, and many others, to try and do what we can to help Canadians with their savings activities – and especially to open up the opportunity of the future to many young people who may not otherwise be able to afford, and participate in, post-secondary education and training programs. For more information, contact CFEE at (416) 968-2236 or mail@cfee.org.

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence 2007-08

The Prime Minister's Awards (PMAs) for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instill in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technology to better equip their students with the skills needed to meet the challenges of a 21st century society and economy.

Certificates of Excellence are awarded to the 15 top-ranked nominees, with at least one award designated for each of the following regions: British Columbia; Prairies; the North (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut); Ontario; Quebec; and Atlantic Canada. Up to 50 of the next top-ranked nominees each receive a Certificate of Achievement.

The deadline for nominations is December 17, 2007. Further information and a nomination form can be accessed on the PMA website at www.pma.gc.ca.

Applying for Educational Leave

Academic Year 2008-09

Article 20 in the Collective Agreement (Article 31 in the Labrador West Agreement) establishes the parameters for paid educational leave. A "leave" is defined as one full university semester, with the exception of the spring semester/third term (May-June), which is considered a half-leave. While on paid educational leave, teachers receive 80 percent of their salary for the number of days their school is open during the university semester, plus two days before the semester begins and two days after it ends. This is to accomodate travel or other demands related to the educational leave. Thus, teachers may have to return to school prior to or after educational leave in any school term to avoid further loss of pay.

There are a total of **62.5** leaves available for teachers covered under the Provincial Collective Agreement; there are **3** leaves available for those teachers covered under the Labrador West Collective Agreement.

The Application Process:

- Teachers must be employed in this province for five years or more (by the end June 2008) to be eligible for paid educational leave for the 2008-09 school year.
- Application is made **to the District**, not directly to the Department of Education.
- Districts may rank applications according to District needs.
- Districts must forward applications to the Department of Education by February 1.
- **DISTRICTS OFTEN HAVE AN EARLIER DEADLINE. CHECK WITH YOUR DISTRICT OFFICE.**
- **Applications received after February 1 will not be considered.**

The Decision-Making Process:

- A committee with representation from the Department of Education, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association makes decisions on granting of awards.
- The committee makes its selections by March 1 of each year.
- Successful applicants are notified by March 30 by the Committee Chair.
- In making its decision, the Committee considers several criteria including, but not limited to:
  - ✓ Whether the applicant has had paid leave in the past.
  - ✓ Current certificate level.
  - ✓ Whether study during leave will lead to a certificate upgrade.
  - ✓ Whether the applicant's job is at risk without re-training/upgrading.
  - ✓ The educational needs of the District and rankings as recommended by the Director.
  - ✓ Program of study (teacher supply and demand/program restrictions).*

No one factor of those listed in the above criteria dominates the Committee's final decision. Each member of the Committee, after thorough discussion of all the factors and after reviewing in detail the information on each applicant, has input to the final selection. Every effort is made to apply the criterion in a consistent fashion, and some aspects of the procedure may be computer assisted.

***If a successful applicant changes his/her planned program of study from that indicated on the original application, the application must be reconsidered by the Selection Committee.**

NOTE TO TEACHERS:
The full text on the NLTA policy regarding the awarding of Educational Leave as well as the Educational Leave Application Form can be found on the NLTA website (www.nlta.nl.ca). A link on the main page called **"Forms Online"** will bring you to the applicable form and policy. Please note that the application form **must be forwarded to your School District** and from there it will be forwarded to the Department of Education. Application must be received at the Department of Education by **FEBRUARY 1, 2008**. ***Districts often have an earlier deadline. Check with your district office.***

Introducing Your 2007-09 Provincial Executive Council

Sean Noah, President

Sean was Teaching Principal of Cape St. Frances Elementary in Pouch Cove before being elected as NLTA President for 2007-09. He can be reached at snoah@nlta.nl.ca or 709-726-3223, ext. 223 or 1-800-563-3599, ext. 223.

Lily Cole, Vice-President

Lily is a member of the Table Officers of the Association, a member of the Advisory Committee on Student Support Services and chairs the Negotiating Team. She is currently on leave from her position as Special Services teacher at Pearce Junior High School in Salt Pond. Lily can be reached at lilyb.cole@nf.sympatico.ca.

Dean Ingram, Table Officer

Dean is Teaching Principal of Swift Current Academy. Besides being a Table Officer, he is a member of the Negotiating Team and chair of the Teacher Health and Wellness Committee. Dean can be reached at dingram@persona.ca.

Paul Pinsent, Table Officer

Paul is English Department Head at Stephenville High School. Besides being a Table Officer, he is chair of the Internal Review of Programs and Services Ad Hoc Committee. Paul can be reached at wpinsent@nf.sympatico.ca.

Callista Burridge

Callista is Assistant Principal of Xavier Junior High in Deer Lake. She is chair of the Group Insurance Committee, and a member of the Group Insurance Collective Agreement Committee, the Provincial Teacher Certification Committee and the Pooled Investment Fund Committee. She can be reached at callista.burridge@nf.sympatico.ca.

James Dinn

Jim is a Level I-III English teacher at Holy Heart High School in St. John's. He is chair of the Finance and Property Committee and chair of the Pooled Investment Fund Committee. He can be reached at jdinn@nl.rogers.com.

Introducing Your 2007-09 Provincial Executive Council

Derek Drover

Derek is Teaching Principal of Victoria Academy in Gaultois. He is a member of the Group Insurance Committee and the EAP Coordinating Committee. He can be reached at dwdrover0223@yahoo.ca.

Jackie Maloney

Jackie is a Non-categorical Special Education teacher at Christ the King School in Rushoon. She is chair of the Equity Issues in Education Committee and a member of the Educational Leave Committee. She can be reached at jmaloney@cdli.ca.

Jean Murphy

Jean is a Grades 7-9 Mathematics and Grades K-6 Numeracy teacher at Long Range Academy in Cow Head. She is chair of the Professional Issues Committee and a member of the Finance and Property Committee. She can be reached at jeanm@nf.sympatico.ca.

Gabriel Ryan

Gabe is a Grade 9 French Immersion teacher at Crescent Collegiate in Blaketown. He is chair of the Communications/Political Action Committee and a member of the Finance and Property Committee and the Pooled Investment Fund Committee. He can be reached at gjryan60@yahoo.ca.

Tina Ryan

Tina Ryan is a Multi-age Grades 1-3 and Grades 4-6 French teacher at Jakeman All-Grade in Trout River. She is chair of the Membership Benefits and Services Committee, and a member of the Pensions Administration Committee and the Finance and Property Committee. She can be reached at tmryan@cdli.ca.

Jeanne Williams

Jean is a Social Studies, Math, Technology and Learning Resources teacher at Discovery Collegiate in Bonavista. She is chair of the Curriculum Committee and a member of the Deferred Salary Leave Plan Committee. She can be reached at jeannewilliams@nf.sympatico.ca.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What are a teacher's rights if he/she wishes to speak against a school board decision?

A. On occasion, school boards make decisions that impact on the professional and personal lives of teachers. Teachers who want to respond to these decisions need to understand their rights and responsibilities as school board employees before doing so.

The Labour law generally states that employees may be disciplined for insubordination. Conduct which constitutes insubordination includes actions of employees that somehow undermine the authority or reputation of the employer. This includes off-duty conduct. Let's take the example of school reconfiguration and closures. It may be justified for a school board to take disciplinary action against a teacher who speaks out at a public meeting against the board's decision to close a school. While teachers, like all Canadians, enjoy the right to freedom of speech and expression, like other employees, they are subject to limitations on this freedom in the context of the employer/employee relationship. This is often referred to as the duty of fidelity or loyalty to one's employer. The more closely an issue is related to the scope and nature of the teacher's employment, the more likely it is that the duty not to undermine the employer will outweigh the teacher's right to speak out publicly on the issue.

When teachers have concerns about school board decisions, these concerns can be expressed through proper channels. For example, teachers can request a separate, closed meeting with board members and administrators to discuss and debate issues. Or, a teacher or group of teachers may choose to professionally express their concerns in a letter to their school board director and chairperson. It would *not* be advisable for teachers to participate in any form of public campaign or debate aimed at overturning a decision of their employer.

If a teacher is disciplined for such conduct, he/she has the right to file a grievance under the provisions of the Collective Agreement. If the grievance proceeds to arbitration, the likelihood of an arbitration board upholding or overturning the discipline will depend on the exact circumstances of the case.

If you are considering speaking, writing or acting in opposition to a school board decision, we strongly recommend that you contact the Benefits and Economic Services Division for advice prior to doing so.

Teachers also ask about their rights as parents when dealing with educational issues that affect their own children. The rights of teachers who are also parents was recognized in 1997 at the NLTA Annual General Meeting, where the following resolution was carried: *That teachers who are parents be permitted to speak as a parent on educational changes affecting their children without jeopardizing their relationship to the employer. (Explanatory Note: The Association should investigate the need for protection of teachers who act in a role as parents.)*

Certainly, provisions of the Schools Act, 1997 which outline appeal procedures for students and parents with respect to decisions of board employees would apply equally to parents who are also teachers. However, decisions regarding school designation and closure, and other similar matters, are made by the elected board members themselves. Therefore, there is no absolute right of appeal with regard to such decisions.

As for the AGM resolution noted above, the NLTA will continue its efforts to negotiate appropriate provisions in the Collective Agreement and lobby government for similar provisions in the Schools Act, 1997 which will provide enhanced protections for teachers who wish to speak publicly as parents without placing their employment relationship at risk.

This information has been prepared by Lloyd Hobbs. For information on this topic or other areas of Benefits and Economic Services, please contact any of the following: Lloyd Hobbs, ext. 230, Don Ash, ext. 231, Perry Downey, ext. 226 or Stefanie Tuff, ext. 232.

Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers

H.H. Stern Award Winner

James Murphy

James Murphy, an E-Teacher with the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI), was a winner of the H.H. Stern Award for 2007. James won the award for his creation of the CDLI French website that looks for innovative ways to share course content with students, including: assignments, homework, review exercises, cultural and listening activities to support the online delivery of the Core French Program. When students visit the CDLI French website (www.cdli.ca/French) they can do anything from reviewing grammar to honing listening skills. The site delivers learning materials directly to students' computers so that they can access it anytime, anywhere.

Of particular interest to students are web-based inquiries, or WebQuests, where students can use the resources of the Internet to build knowledge based on a series of prescribed instructions. Students enjoy the cultural activities, some great tunes and can challenge their listening skills with short CLOZE activities or "mini-recherche" on notable artists. James has served as a French first language, immersion, and core programs, all of which have enabled him to identify student needs and related teaching strategies, to develop resources, and to motivate students and colleagues alike. He has developed curriculum for French first language education, he is largely responsible for enabling these schools to meet their curriculum objectives through distance learning initiatives, he has worked as a French consultant in the Stephenville area, and he has created Web resources for the entire high school Core French Program.

The H.H. Stern Award was established to encourage school-based educators to focus on innovations in the classroom, the school and the community. The projects must apply new techniques or strategies to learning and identify the impact of the project in the classroom, school or community and on student language learning. Ideally, the projects have the potential for duplication in other classrooms, schools and communities.

The award was named in memory of Dr. H.H. Stern in recognition of his contribution to second language instruction in Canada. Dr. Stern was Head of the Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education until 1981 and initiated the National Core French Study that provided Core French with a major research foundation for a revised curriculum and teaching strategies.

This year, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) Selection Committee received an array of interesting projects of merit. They selected four award recipients spanning the country from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador, and representing Core French, French Immersion and Aboriginal Language teaching and learning programs. Learn more about these exciting projects on the association website, www.caslt.org.

A Side Trip to Learning

by MARY VAN THIEL

For eight days in August I experienced a place that has not yet been fully exposed to the effects of globalization and modernization. Eight educators ranging from elementary to university, four from the United States and four from Canada attended Cuba Education Tours whose aim is for participants to partake in the best of island culture at the people-to-people level. The tour was designed for teachers who seek to better understand Cuba and at the same time, opportunity was available to meet and share ideas and strategies for making education more fun and interesting.

As educators it is our responsibility to get our students to address controversial issues in our society. We have to fill in the gaps in our curriculum by bringing in people and resources to our classroom, which lead our students to debate these issues while at the same time encouraging them to analyze and discuss various viewpoints. The more training and exposure we have in current issues the better we can teach and at the same time give students the opportunity to develop critical minds. This educational tour enables educators to gain an understanding of the current conditions in Cuba through three inter-related perspectives – education, the economy and culture. We were given the opportunity to link with teachers not only from North America, but also from Cuba.

The program began in Havana with Dr. Delio Carrera, Professor of History and lawyer at the University of Havana. In his unique way, Dr. Carrera showed us his campus and discussed how the educational system works in Cuba. We were given the opportunity to view its law library and the Hemingway room, a gift from Ernest Hemingway built with the money from his 1954 Noble Prize winnings. The University of Havana, founded in 1728, is an esteemed institute of higher learning with academic ties to venerable universities in Canada and the rest of the world. Dr. Carrera presented a commemorative coin to an educator from the United States and one to an educator from Canada. The Canadian educator, Curtis Magnuson's coin was dated 1983 and commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the 1953 assault on the Moncada Barracks at Santiago de Cuba which is seen as the beginning of the Cuban Revolution.

Mary (left) with teachers from America and Canada.

A visit to the Museum of Literacy showed us how changes to the educational system have taken place in Cuba since the revolution. Before implementing a literacy program it is important to understand the social, political, and economic context of the society in which the program is taking place. Director Luisa Campos stated that after the revolution Cuba inherited a society in which over 60 percent were semi-illiterate, could hardly read and write, and what some people define as "functional illiterate". The disparity between rural and urban Cuba was significant with urban illiteracy being only 11.6 percent, while rural illiteracy was an incredible 41.7 percent. Today in Cuba, despite the embargo, the statistics show how well the educational system is functioning. There are currently 400,000 students enrolled in schools. Ninety-nine percent of the students currently attend school, with a 99.9 percent retention rate. The student/teacher ratio is 13.6 to 1, that is one teacher for every 13.6 students. While there were only a handful of universities before the revolution, all catering to the well to do, now there are approximately 45 universities and institutes with an enrollment of close to 250,000, and with a total of 24,800 professors. The literacy rate is currently 98% with an average 12-grade level according to the UNESCO Report on Education in Latin America. Today, Cuba, although one of the poorest countries in Latin America, shows the best results in education.

We were heartily welcomed at the Union de Pedagogos de Cuba (Cuban Federation of Teachers)

headquarters to discuss the Cuban education system. I was able to present them with NLTA pins as a token of my appreciation, compliments of the NLTA. The Union de Pedagogos de Cuba does not influence curriculum and is responsible for professional development and certification of all Cuban teachers. Its 11 volunteer members are responsible for 23,000 members. It offers courses such as Literacy by Context, Citizenship by Participation, Education in the Community, linguistics and many more courses. They want to increase teachers' standards by offering courses at the Masters and Ph.D. level. It also recognizes outstanding teachers in the 20th century. They help other countries such as Venezuela in their literacy development. Their October meeting was scheduled to deal with "The Challenge of Teachers in the 21st Century", one being the need for teachers to be more professional, not only in knowledge of education but in their behavior as educators. The teaching of reading has always been a contested area in the world, even more so in Latin American countries. Good preparation provides a strong foundation for any effective literacy program, particularly in Cuba.

Helping children become literate is one of the biggest challenges in today's classroom in which all teachers are stakeholders and the Union de Pedagogos de Cuba is working hard to make this happen. Literacy skills often underpin successful learning across the curriculum, whilst building confidence and self-esteem in young learners that is so crucial to success in every area of life.

The language of art has become the next literacy – the fourth "R". In his article, *Cognition and Representation*, Elliot Eisner suggests that education needs to be about forms of representation, which will influence the process, the content, equality and the culture of learning. The importance of having many forms of representation available not only in our school but also in our community is necessary to reach many types of learners. Visual learners are more prevalent today. I found that two artists in Cuba are using appropriate activities for everyone, from those who cannot yet read and write to those who are already fairly fluent readers and writers. According to Dr. William Fagan, in his article *Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, "literacy is far from being a passive act." Engagement of the learner regardless of level or ability should be evident in teaching. These artists are instilling in the learner a sense of ownership for their learning. Representing and viewing broaden the ways in which people can communicate and understand the range of communication tools. Tapping into the learner's interests, though visual, is one way to enable them to extend their knowledge.

Learning experiences, which allow students to think critically about how images convey meaning, should be essential inclusions in classroom literacy programs.

Callejon de Hamel is an alley in which the façades of all the buildings display murals inspired by AfroCuban religious themes. This area was initiated by the sculptor and painter Salvador Gonzáles, and the project dates from 1990 and highlights the importance of African influences on Cuban culture. The idea was to create a cultural platform within the community. The area is well known for its found art. The last Friday of each month is turned over to recitals of ballads, poetry and traditional music and one Saturday each month the focus is on children's entertainment with clowns, puppet shows and performances.

Some children in front of well known artist José Fuster's studio.

A visit to José Fuster, one of Cuba's most important ceramists and painters at his whimsical studio in Jaimanita, just outside of Havana was a special treat. The artist, who has exhibited all over the world, is spending some of his earnings to improve his neighbors' homes, organizing friends to improve the quality of life in a city where few are truly starving, but most scrimp and scrape to survive. He is also involving the community to be active participants in the process. Fuster is foremost an artist who is dedicated to his creations. He has not only a vast array of artwork from ceramics evoking the nation's African roots, as represented in the Santeria religion, but whimsical paintings drawn from ordinary life in Cuba: commuters crowded inside creaky, smoke-belching buses, the ubiquitous dominoes games in backyards and street corners. In person, he brings the passion of his work to his beliefs.

We walked to the Casa del niño y de la niña Community Project where we met with Director Rosa Sardinas for a presentation on the outreach work to kids in the area of Cayo Hueso. The Casa is a community-based project and offers painting, music, dance, computer labs, and other skill development workshops to students after their regular school day. It also supports learning for teens and adults in the neighborhood. One of the goals of the center is to ensure that students attend school. Its modest facilities comprise classrooms, a playground and small library. Here we met two young students training to be teachers and were entertained by the younger children at the center. Learning English means greater academic, career and leadership opportunities for Cuban youth. In past years, Canadian teachers have worked as volunteers to teach kids and teenagers to learn English. Cuban volunteers initiated the English program at the Casa del niño y de la niña. There is a program for retired educators and ESL tutors to spend three weeks in Havana sharing their English language skills with primary level and university students. Check out Cuba education programs at www.hellocuba.ca or www.cubavolunteer.com/. As volunteers you'll have the choice of planning and teaching English language courses to children, teenagers or mature students. You'll design and prepare your own class content and methodology. There are no Cuban teachers involved. You'll be working directly with one to three students. In order to respond to the challenges of today's diverse learner, the focus of instruction should be on developing strategies to meet students' needs at the classroom, school and community levels. Examining what motivates learners to improve their literacy skills and at the same time offering ways to encourage them to participate and feel a connection will ensure a positive learning experience. At Casa del niño y de la niña we see this in action. Our group presented Director Rosa Sardinas with educational supplies to the center. Our donations, though small, were appreciated by the director and the children.

Our group was given the opportunity to explore the cultural aspects of Havana during our five days in the city. We walked through the streets of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and saw beautiful colonial buildings. Here we learned about the people those buildings displaced, the reasons many are in a terrible state of disrepair, and the efforts that

Three students who attend the Casa del niño y de la niña Community Project.

international organizations are making to help resurrect them. Visiting the area where Hemingway and Graham Green gained inspiration for their works was an added feature. Our ferryboat ride across Havana Harbor to the municipality of Regla showed us the AfroCuban community, which has a long, rich and still active tradition of African-inspired religions. We visited Regla's church dedicated to the black "Virgen de Regla" Yemayá, the African goddess of the sea in the Yoruba religion and the patron saint of sailors and toured Regla's Municipal Museum. Modern Havana such as the Capitol Building, the Revolution Square, Colon, Malecón Sea Wall, and the Miramar, were a delight. Also included in Havana was a visit to the School of Medicine, the Museum of Revolution (which was housed in the Presidential Palace and displayed the history of the Cuban Revolution), the Havana Forest, and of course, an open air market.

The tour continued to the province of Pinar del Río, a rural district where families raise goats and other animals for the pantry, sale or trade. In Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve, declared a Reserve of the Biosphere by UNESCO in 1985, we visited the rural village called Rancho Curujey, a self-sustaining community whose goals of reforestation, historical preservation, and environmental balance were set up with the help of Canadians. We visited the ruins of a French Coffee Plantation, Buena Vista Coffee Plantation, in Las Terrazas built in 1801 and originally worked by African slaves. Besides acting as a model community for progressive land uses and ecological study, Las Terrazas has recently adapted itself to host tourists. Our wonderful tour guide, Mildred, informed us that all secondary students have to complete a volunteer program as part of their education. She spent three summers working in the tobacco fields. This is similar in part to our Duke of Edinburgh Program where volunteering is a major component. Students in Newfoundland and Labrador can gain credit upon completion of this valuable program.

We spent two and a half days exploring the rural agriculture-based Viñales Valley with its spectacular natural landscape featuring the most interesting and varied geological formations in the Caribbean. The Valley is particularly famous for its great free-standing rock formations called mogotes. In the late 1990s, UNESCO declared it a world cultural and natural heritage site. The Mural de la Prehistoria is a huge painting made on the side of a mogote. This was painted by a local artist to pay tribute to the Darwinian perspective of evolution.

We were also given the opportunity to visit kindergarden "Circulo Infantil" and talk to students and teachers. Mothers who work were able to leave their children at the center. This center works closely with families in the area. We saw dads who had finished working in the fields picking up their children. We did a walking and boat tour through the Cueva del Indio used by Guanahatabey Amerindians as a burial site, and later as a refuge from Spanish slavers. At the open air craft market in Parque Martí we encountered a downpour, which cut short our shopping. At the local tobacco farm we met one of the many delightful children on our tour and he showed us one of his many baby pigs! We visited an agricultural cooperative in Pinar del Río and met with its members who grew tobacco, coffee, bananas, pineapple root and leaf vegetables. Here we gave educational supplies to the families and we were invited to have coffee in their homes.

The overwhelming hospitality and enthusiasm of all those we met was evident in the smiles and warmth we received from teachers and children. I have many fond memories of Cuba and the wonderful people I met. Yes, there is free time to enjoy the sounds and color of Cuba; I have over 700 photos to view of my visit! While this experience has opened my eyes to the reality of life in Cuba and the impact of life under the Embargo, there is a sense of optimism from the people. The desire and motivation to improve, particularly in the area of literacy, is evident from all that I met.

This was a once in a lifetime experience and for that I am truly thankful. I can highly recommend this trip if you are looking for a different experience from the regular tourist fare that you would get in an all-inclusive resort. It has been through the efforts of all of the people involved that we had such a successful experience. Canadians are welcomed with open arms in Cuba. Everywhere we went we proudly displayed our Canadian pins. Cubans claim Canada is among the few countries in the world that has not turned its back on them. All working teachers are invited to come to Cuba in December 2007 to learn about the island's education and social system and celebrate the New Year in Havana. Contact Marcel in Vancouver (toll free 877-687-3817), email marcel@cubafriends.ca for more details, or email me at maryvanthiel@esdnl.ca and I can share with you some of my many photos.

Mary van Thiel is a Special Education teacher at Macdonald Drive Junior High in St. John's.

Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

by MARIE WALL

If you have trouble getting to sleep or fall asleep easily only to awake in the middle of the night unable to fall back to sleep, you may not be getting what you need to feel fully rested the next day. If this describes you, you are not alone. I have listened to many teachers who have said that a good night's sleep is infrequent. How much sleep is required, the ill effects and what can be done to help are all individual concerns that need to be personally addressed. Better sleep routines, improved sleeping environments and relaxation techniques may help you get enough sleep.

Being blurry eyed is only the beginning of the common signs of sleep deprivation which can negatively affect focus, concentration and memory. It can change one's behaviour and tolerance to external events. And some research suggests that the long-term impact can compromise your immune system. Lack of sleep can also prod you to drink more caffeine and to eat more just to keep you going, which can cause weigh gain. There are different schools of thought on how many hours of sleep are required but one thing to remember is that sleep is an individual concern and how much a person needs can range from five hours to ten hours. The key is to get enough sleep to be able to function well on a daily basis.

There are many things that can affect how much sleep you get. Knowing what these things are is a starting point in changing how you manage the situation. The lifestyle activities range from physical routines to medical problems and include diet, exercise, stress, anxiety, and even your attitude.

Parents often pay more attention to their children's bedtime routines than their own. Getting to sleep for adults is no different and having good pre-sleep rituals can really help. If you have problems falling to sleep a few suggestions include:

• Make regular bedtime schedules for both going to sleep and waking up. This eliminates the need to make a decision about whether you should go to bed and it is important to maintain that schedule seven days a week. This allows your body to know what to expect.

• Develop a bedtime ritual that involves slowing down and relaxing. This reminds your body that it is time to unwind; anything that needs to be done will have to wait until the next day. Part of the routine can be drinking a cup of tea, taking a bath or listening to relaxing music.

• Let go of tasks and concerns – write them on a note pad. Often when people have unfinished tasks and concerns, they make a mental list that plays over in their head like a broken record. There is no need to carry them to bed with you; by writing them down you can reassure yourself you will not forget them and you can pick them up the next day.

Waking part way through the night can be a real nightmare. I have often heard from teachers who say they just can't get back to sleep. After a little exploration it is clear the reason is because mental alertness keeps them awake. If when you wake you start thinking about things that need to be done, conversations that have taken place or other concerns which have no place in the night, it will surely take you out of the restful mode. The key to returning to sleep is relaxation.

We have all heard that counting sheep will put you to sleep; some of you may have even tried it. While this may not have worked for you, a mental exercise to lull you to sleep may be just what is needed.

Visualization can help. Get yourself on a dream-like path. Imagine something that is soothing such as walking a trail on a warm day – just taking one step at a time and breathing to each step. Let your mind focus on your breathing as you continue on, allowing yourself to drift off as you take each step.

Body relaxation can allow you to focus and relax. Starting at your toes, imagine the muscles in your toes and feet relaxing, just let go. Then notice your legs, your calves and shins and consciously allow the muscles to loosen. And slowly move up through your whole body. The relaxation will be good for you and dozing off to sleep will be easier.

Deep breathing can also be a helpful relaxation tool. Lie in a comfortable position and slowly inhale through your nose, say for the count of four. As you breathe in, imagine filling your whole body, your chest, your belly and your arms and legs. Then while breathing out again slowly imagine all the air releasing taking with it all tension or tightness. Continue to breathe in and out, allowing yourself to drift into deeper and deeper relaxation.

Notice all of the above suggestions have to do with relaxing, not engaging your mind. Watching TV or reading an absorbing book can be stimulating and keep you awake.

Self care in every area of your life is essential to healthy balanced living. While bedtime rituals and relaxation are tools you can use, what you do daily for your health sets the foundation for a good night's sleep. There are a number of habits that influence your daily sleep patterns. Daily exercise is recommended; and remember avoid exercise up to four hours before bedtime; the adrenaline can keep you awake. Alcohol is a depressant and can negatively affect one's sleep; apparently this worsens as we age, so limit alcohol consumption. Smoking is a stimulant, so if you cannot quit smoking, avoid late night or mid night cigarettes.

If your inability to get a good night's sleep continues there are supports you can search out. Your Employee Assistance Program can make a referral to a counsellor who could help deal with concerns that may be interfering with your sleep or teach you relaxation techniques. You can discuss the sleeping problems with your doctor. There is now a sleep clinic in Newfoundland and Labrador that may be a resource for you. They deal with medical interventions for disorders such as sleep apnea, teeth grinding or other things that are getting in the way of a good night's sleep. A good night's sleep goes a long way in recharging your batteries and helping you cope with all that life brings your way.

Marie Wall is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Marie Wall (ext. 265) or Claudette Coombs (ext. 242).

Embrace Every Moment

by GEORGE TUCKER

As I stepped gingerly on to the balcony I knew that this would be another glorious day in paradise. A hundred meters or so away, I could faintly see and hear the relentless waves advancing and retreating on the ivory-coloured sandy beach. The silhouettes of the meticulously maintained buildings and the beautiful grounds stood serenely under the cover of the moonlit sky.

The last week of August at the Gran Bahia Principe on the Mexican Riviera had been fabulous. Every aspect of our vacation had unfolded as if it had been carefully scripted by some award-winning movie director. Yet, the truth of the matter was that we had taken the trip on a moment's notice when we came to the stark realization that summer was nearly over and we were mentally and physically exhausted. For years we had postponed planning a sun vacation because we always rationalized that the money was needed elsewhere. It's funny how some of us tend to put materialistic acquisitions over health, wellness or just plain pleasure.

Ruby and I were to be in the main foyer of the hotel by 8:15 a.m. to catch our bus back to the Cancun airport. I had volunteered to get up first. So while Ruby slept I moved quietly through my morning routine. The bags had been packed the evening before and we had decided to enjoy another tantalizing breakfast before embarking on our long journey home. At about 6:15 I vacated the bathroom and suggested that it was time for Ruby to shake off the cobwebs as the morning was quickly evaporating. There was still much to do if we were to honour our rendezvous time.

A couple of moments later the tranquility of our morning and holiday abruptly ended. Without notice or explanation, I became disoriented and ill. Every pore in my body opened simultaneously and within a millisecond I was bathed in sweat. Ruby was summoned and I reported that I was not well. She instantly saw my distress when my eyes went from white to blood red in a nanosecond. I was in serious trouble and she knew it.

I staggered to the bed nearby and lay there wondering, "What is happening to me?" I could feel my heart racing and I was having trouble breathing. Within seconds my throat started to constrict. Being both educators, we recognized the symptoms and we knew that I was having an allergic reaction. Several times during our careers we had experienced students with allergies to a multitude of products. On a few occasions we had seen students with severe allergies experience anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a rare, life-threatening emergency in which the body's response to the allergen is sudden and affects the whole body. Ruby and I both suspected the worst and knew that I needed immediate medical intervention.

Ruby went into action and called the front desk. As she struggled to convey my dilemma to the Spanish clerk and subsequent medical staff, I fought to simply survive. During those few moments while we waited for the doctor and paramedic to arrive, I wondered if I would make it. My throat was continuing to constrict so my condition was becoming graver with each passing moment. As I lay there I succinctly told Ruby what I was experiencing so that she could tell the doctor in the event that I could not. I thought of my daughter, Allison, and asked that Ruby make sure to tell her that "I love her." I thought of friends and family but only for a fleeting moment. Other than that, I had no thought of materialistic things, wealth, mortgage, bills, etc. I was trying to survive and I was afraid but also somewhat peaceful. At 'no' time did I think of 'spending more time at the office'.

Within a few minutes the doctor and paramedic arrived. My vital signs were taken and Ruby communicated what had happened. The doctor gave me two injections. At the time I had no idea what they were. I only knew that I could feel the burning as the medication circulated throughout my body. Almost immediately I felt better. My breathing became normal, the sweating stopped and my heart rate normalized. The doctor spoke to me and I was able to relate what I had experienced. The medical team stayed for twenty minutes or so and asked me to sit up and eventually stand and walk. Occasionally the doctor checked my vital signs. While we waited to see if all was going to be well, we conversed. Fortunately the doctor could speak very good English and I discov-

ered that he was aware of St. John's as his younger brother had attended high school in St. John's as part of the International Education Program that is sponsored by the Eastern School District. This connection was helpful and Ruby and I both felt that I received excellent medical intervention. Before departing, the doctor recommended that I purchase some Gatorade to replace the electrolytes that I may have lost during my week in the sun.

Ruby and I decided that we would fly home as scheduled. So, we prepared quickly and we managed to catch our bus to the airport. Our early morning emergency was kept private and we enjoyed an uneventful trip back to St. John's. No mention of what had happened or could have happened was broached. I believe that we both knew that I had been very lucky. In a different circumstance at a different resort or if the reaction had happened in flight, I may not have survived. Our minds did not want to go there!

Since returning home on September 2nd, we have occasionally reflected on our wonderful vacation and that last morning. We remind ourselves that life is precious and nothing should ever be taken for granted. I have recently visited my doctor and he concluded that I had most likely experienced anaphylaxis. If so, I would have probably died without the prompt medical attention that was provided. He thinks that the Mexican doctor gave me injections of Benadryl and Epinephrine. In the near future I will be visiting a specialist to see if s/he can identify the thing that caused the allergic reaction. In the interim, I must carry an EpiPen just in case it should happen again.

I was initially hesitant to write this article because what happened is obviously a private matter. However, as time has passed I felt that my experience might be a valuable lesson for others as well. While I have provided the details of the emergency to provide a context, the medical issue is really of little consequence. What I want to emphasize is that our lives can change in a nanosecond. We must never become complacent about our health or our longevity. Let's remember to embrace every moment that we have and to avoid putting off those special trips or experiences that we plan to do next week, or tomorrow or when we retire. Unfortunately, tomorrow will not come for everyone. Good luck in finding a balance in your lives that will allow you to work effectively while enjoying all that life has to offer. Take it from me, dear colleagues and friends, when your number is called, you will not wish that you had spent more time at the office. Take care and good luck.

George Tucker is an Administrative Officer with the Professional Development Division of the NLTA.

Retirement: Swimming in Different Waters

by MYRTIS GUY

When I turned 51 I decided that I would once again try to learn to swim. It was around the same time that after 31 years in education I was giving some thought to retirement.

Having grown up around the ocean in Notre Dame Bay, people expressed surprise when I admitted that I could not swim. Although I had spent many childhood summers on the beach and in the boat with my father, I never quite got over my terrible fear of the water. As children we were taught by our parents that the ocean was a place where people made their living and a place that oft times took the lives of friends and family. It was not a place for "fooling around" and swimming was considered a leisure activity to be done in one of the brooks or ponds. Besides, the ocean was freezing cold for most of the year!

When I began swimming lessons at one of the local pools, I was petrified. While the instructor didn't actually have to peel me off the side of the pool, I needed a lot of coaxing before I would immerse first my face and then my whole body into the water. The biggest challenge came when I needed to lift my feet off the bottom of the pool and actually try to "swim". Upon reflection I realize it had a lot to do with trust; trusting the young instructor and trusting myself. It also had a lot to do with fear of the unknown, fear of what would happen if I panicked, and fear of losing control. I had become quite comfortable with what I had always known, two feet planted firmly on solid ground.

As I was driving home one night after one of my not-so-successful swimming lessons, it occurred to me that struggling with learning to swim and struggling with the decision to retire had some similarities. At the time when I was contemplating retirement I had my feet planted firmly in a position that had become professionally and personally rewarding. I was comfortable with my responsibilities, my income, and my work environment. I had been blessed with a rewarding career as a teacher, administrator, and consultant. Over the years I had worked with many wonderful colleagues and had made many treasured friends along the way. At the time I viewed retirement as giving up all that I knew and trusted. It would mean taking my feet off the bottom, trusting my own judgement, and venturing into unknown waters. How would I cope with a new financial reality? What would I do all day, all week, all year? How would I maintain my social contacts? Would I lose touch with learning? How would my identity change? In other words, would I sink or swim?

As educators we often define who we are by what we do each day. People who know us often define who we are by our professional responsibilities. Retirement means letting go of a very big part of our identity, giving up known routines, schedules, and yearly rhythms, having extra leisure time, and creating a new identity for ourselves. We become anxious as we contemplate all the changes that will occur once we've taken the plunge. No doubt about it, making the decision to retire is life-altering, not one to be taken lightly. It means taking risks and trusting our own judgement.

After much soul searching and consideration, I decided I would retire. What helped me to make the decision? Attending a pre-retirement seminar sponsored by the NLTA, talking to colleagues who have recently retired, consulting with financial advisors, and having the support of family all helped me with my decision. But in the end, it was a decision that only I could make. I had to trust that I would be able to redefine my identity and become comfortable with the new identity I would create. I came to realize that my "craft knowledge", as Roland Barth calls it, would not disappear overnight after I retired. I had to trust what other retired colleagues and financial advisors had told me. I had to trust my own judgement.

As educators we are fortunate to have a Collective Agreement that allows us to retire at an age where we still have much to offer to our community and the labour/job market. The skills and expertise we have built up over the years serve us well when we decide to try our hand at something else. There are retired educators all over the world who are using their well-honed skills to teach elsewhere. Some of us have stayed closer to home to find employment in other jobs far removed from schools and classrooms. Some of us have decided we would rather spend more time with our family, spend time travelling, become "snowbirds", and some have chosen to simply recharge our mental and physical batteries after a long and rewarding career with children and colleagues. What we all have in common, though, is that we have learned to take our feet off the bottom and swim in different waters.

Myrtis Guy is a retired teacher, administrator, consultant who now spends part of her year teaching pre-service teachers at MUN and part of her year in a heated pool in the sunny South. She is quick to point out she has adjusted better to retirement than to swimming.

Vocal Performance on the Classroom Stage

by AIMEE KELLY

Luciano Pavarotti, the world-renowned Italian opera singer of this century, performed on various stages, captivating audiences from around the world with his "bel canto" tenor voice. Over 40 years of his life were dedicated to professional vocal performance. Such dedication was surely not void of both on-stage and off-stage monitoring of vocal health and hygiene, which has included warm-ups, cool-downs, vocal exercises and appropriate rest.

Like Pavarotti, teachers too are vocal performers who have a stage to perform on – their classroom, and an audience to address – their students. Unfortunately, unlike professional actors and singers, most teachers are not privy to vocal training. They are often unaware of the factors that contribute to vocal misuse/abuse and the preventative measures that can be implemented into their daily lives to promote a healthy voice. As a result, many speech-language pathologists have teachers who come into their clinic and say, "I have a frog in my throat!", "My throat is scratchy", or "My voice feels tired".

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) in the United States reports that approximately 7.5 million people have diseases or disorders of the voice with teachers having more vocal problems than any other profession. In a study completed in 1998, Smith and colleagues determined that teachers are also 32 times more likely to be afflicted with a voice disorder than individuals in other professions and at least one-half of all teachers will experience a voice disorder at some time in their professional lives compared to 4-6 percent of the general population. The good news is that approximately 75% of teachers' voice problems can be prevented or self-rehabilitated.

The focus of this article is to provide teachers working within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador with insight into some of the contributing factors of vocal difficulties. Furthermore, teachers will develop strategies to become their own advocates for vocal health by incorporating preventative measures within their classroom and daily lives to promote a healthier voice.

Physical Factors

Working as a teacher places high demands on vocal performance because most of the communication within the classroom is verbal. Not only are teachers required to deliver information to their students orally, they must also consider the tone and inflection within their voices to ensure that students are engaged and interest is not lost. This becomes increasingly difficult when the voice is afflicted by fatigue due to vocal loading, or sustained and extensive use of the voice. The average teacher spends approximately five hours a day teaching with little time for vocal rest. This extensive voice use is further stressed by less than ideal postural positions when speaking within the classroom. For example, the teacher who reaches up to the blackboard to write while speaking may find that tension has developed in both the neck and shoulder muscles, while the teacher who hunches over the student's desk to assist with daily work tasks is not in the most optimal position to facilitate proper breath support for speaking. Such postural positions lead to tension within the voice muscles which may ultimately result in vocal fatigue.

Finally, when we go to the gym to workout, one of the key components of our exercise regime is stretching our muscles both before and after our workout to reduce muscle tension, increase flexibility and help prevent injury. The dime-sized vocal folds we use to produce sound are also muscles that require stretching. Like athletes, professional singers and actors have been educated on the benefits of incorporating warm-ups and cool-downs into their daily vocal regime to ensure optimal voice production and prevent vocal damage. Given that teachers use there voices professionally on a daily basis, it seems logical that they too would benefit from vocal warm-ups and cool-downs. Unfortunately, teachers often receive little education regarding vocal care.

Environmental Factors

Aside from the physical factors that contribute to vocal symptoms in teachers, there are also several environmental factors which can have a negative impact on a teacher's overall vocal health. The structure and layout of the classroom is one factor. For example, hard surfaced walls, ceilings, and floors do not absorb sound well. Instead, they reflect sound and cause it to continuously bounce around the classroom. Couple this with chatty students, noisy ventilation and air conditioning systems, rattling desks and the background murmurs from hallways, open windows and neighbouring classrooms and the teacher is faced with an endless echo of sounds. This causes the teacher to "up the ante" by over-exerting his/her voice to increase volume in order to be heard.

Humidity levels also play a role in vocal health. The vocal folds are like a reed of an oboe. When moist, they easily vibrate to produce sound. However, when dry, they become stiff and less pliable, resulting in an increased effort to produce sound. Such effort can further damage these tiny, delicate muscles, creating a poorer vocal quality. Therefore, controlling humidity levels is a key factor in monitoring vocal health. If humidity levels are too low, which often occurs during the winter months or in heated or air conditioned rooms, moisture in the air is reduced, causing chapped lips, itchy eyes, and a sore throat to develop. However, if humidity levels are too high, a breeding ground for dust mites, mold, mildew and fungus is created, which can also have adverse effects on vocal health. So what are the best levels? According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, the most favourable level for room humidity is 50%. When humidity levels are between 40-50%, fewer respiratory problems develop.

A recent study that was funded by the Clorox Company in the United States found that teachers are the number one professionals to have thriving bacteria in the workplace. Their constant exposure to germs, viruses and upper respiratory infections (URI) suppresses their immune systems and further compromises their vocal health. A common voice disorder that is associated with a URI or bacterial infection is laryngitis, which can be temporary (less than a few days) or long-standing (over three weeks). In its acute stage, the recommendation is often voice rest coupled with internal and external hydration and antibiotics if prescribed. For a teacher, the recommendation to "rest your voice" can be quite discerning, given that his/her livelihood relies upon the use of his/her voice to teach. Therefore, s/he may choose to plod along, avoiding this "minor" vocal annoyance and unknowingly develop maladaptive compensatory strategies in order to be heard (e.g., shouting, increasing volume, or straining the voice). After several weeks of this vocal abuse, however, with no vocal resolution, requesting sick leave may be the only viable option. What was once a "minor" vocal annoyance has now become a "major" vocal concern for both the teacher and his/her employer; the teacher is concerned about his/her professional career and ability to return to work while the employer is faced with higher expenditures due to teacher absenteeism.

Psycho-Emotional Factors

Increased workload, long working hours, pupil disruption, and constant adaptation to curriculum changes are a few of the many factors that can cause work related stress for a teacher. It is obvious that for most teachers, their work day goes beyond the regular school hour day, as lessons must be planned, exams must be marked and assignments reviewed and graded. Such long hours, however, do play a role in overall vocal health, causing psychological stress to transcend to physical stress, as tension develops in muscles within the body, including the muscles used for speech.

When we speak, we have a group of subsystems within our body that work together in a coordinated fashion. These include: the respiratory system which is our energy source, the larynx (voice box) which is our sound generator, the pharynx (throat) which is our sound resonator, and the oral cavity (mouth) which shapes the sounds we make for speech. All of these subsystems, however, are controlled by the head honcho – the brain. Endless late nights correcting homework assignments and worrying about how to manage classroom behaviour or keep up with curricular expectations can be overwhelming and cause a great deal of anxiety for a teacher. Over time, this psychological strain on the brain leads to a generalized physical fatigue of the body, which radiates to the muscles used to produce speech. The result is a slouched posture, inappropriate breath support and an overall uncoordinated speech system. Eventually, the teacher may develop vocal symptoms which include a sore and/or dry throat, tenderness in the neck muscles, vocal fatigue, or a hoarse vocal quality.

Keeping Your Voice Healthy: Tips of the Trade

While there are many factors that contribute to vocal problems, there are several things that can be done to maintain vocal health. The online Voice Academy at www.uiowa.edu/~shcvoice/ is a great place to start! It is a virtual school that was built by the National Centre for Voice and Speech to promote vocal health of teachers living within the United States. When you

enter the school, take a stroll down to the "Nurses Office" to find out information on voice disorders and when to seek medical care. After meeting with the nurse, take a walk to the "Media Centre" to learn about amplification systems and their benefit within the classroom environment. Put on your sweat pants and lace up your sneakers as you enter the "gymnasium" to explore the connection between a healthy body and a healthy voice. Follow it up with a trip to the "auditorium" for some tips on vocal warm-up and voice projection. Oh, and what would a school be without some form of grading system? Take the "How's your vocal health?" quiz to determine how your voice is holding up within your classroom. When you have successfully explored all of the rooms within the Voice Academy and are ready to graduate, the school will even award you with a diploma for your achievement.

Aside from the Voice Academy, I have also included a list of tips that will surely help to improve your performance on the classroom stage:

• Soak up sound and reduce noise within the classroom. The softer the object, the better its sound absorption will be. Therefore, soak up sound with sound deadening wall covers such as fabric panels or cork bulletin boards, hang a row of coats and a few plants and ensure that your windows have drapes. To reduce background noise, close windows and doors, slit an X in tennis balls and apply them to the bottoms of desk legs and turn off fans when giving a lecture.

• Be up close and personal. Standing in front of your desk as opposed to behind and walking around the room while talking will not only help prevent vocal strain, it may also keep your students more active and engaged in the classroom lesson.

• Kill the germs. Wash your hands frequently and keep a hand sanitizer with you at all times to ward of pesky germs and viruses.

• Avoid vocally abusive habits. Excessive coughing and throat clearing can damage the delicate vocal muscles. Replace these behaviours with a swallow or a sip of water.

• Rest your mind, body and soul. Taking short periods of vocal rest will allow your vocal muscles time to recover; getting the appropriate amount of sleep will ensure that both your mind and body are well-rested; unwinding from work stressors by seeking out stress relieving activities such as music, reading, quiet meditation and exercise will help reduce/eliminate stress.

• Incorporate augmentative/alternative forms of communication. Be creative and develop alternative forms of communication to reduce the amount of voice use within the classroom, especially when you are attempting to regain control of the class. This could include blowing a whistle, tapping the desk with a gavel, clapping your hands or silently standing at the front of the class and waiting expectantly for your class to attend. Investing in a portable voice amplification device such as the ChatterVox will ensure that your lecture is heard without compromising your vocal health.

• Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. Keep a bottle of water in your classroom and sip it throughout the day to ensure that your vocal folds are moistened; keep humidity levels between 40-50%. You can also purchase a personal steam vaporizer to use before school and/or during breaks to moisten the nasal passage and lubricate the vocal muscles.

• Avoid/reduce consumption of dehydrating agents. Caffeine, alcohol and certain cold and allergy medications consisting of antihistamines or decongestants create a drying effect on the vocal folds. Reducing consumption and doubling up on the amount of water intake when consuming such agents will help reduce this drying effect. Avoid smoking as it not only dries the vocal folds, but also irritates the voice muscles and decreases lung function, adding further stress to the voice when speaking.

• Tune in to your voice. Listen to the sound of your voice and pay attention to how it feels. If your voice sounds hoarse or breathy or you feel discomfort for longer than two weeks, contact a physician or speech-language pathologist.

Now that you have taken the Vocal Health 101 class, you can feel confident that every time you step onto the classroom stage, your vocal performance will be sensational and deserving of a standing ovation. I hope that the knowledge gained will jump start your journey through a successful and vocally healthy teaching career. As the old theatre saying goes, "Break a leg!"

Aimee Kelly is a Speech-Language Pathologist working with Eastern Health. She has a special interest in the assessment and treatment of individuals with voice disorders and promoting vocal health and hygiene. Aimee can be reached at aimee.kelly@utoronto.ca.

BANFF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2008: CREATING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

February 20-22, 2008

Banff, Alberta. Canadian educational leaders are meeting again in Banff to hear, learn and share new ideas about leadership in education. You will have the opportunity to hear three published authors (Dr. Marcia Tate, Dr. James Stronge, Allison Zmuda) with international speaking, teaching and consulting experience. For more information and to register, go to www.creedseminars.com or call toll-free: 1-866-882-7333.

SHARING OUR CULTURES... A LA DÉCOUVERTE DE NOS CULTURES

March 16-18, 2008

St. John's (Location to be announced). Sharing our Cultures...À la Découverte de Nos Cultures is an educational and multicultural event showcasing more than 25 countries and cultures of students in our schools. Sunday, March 16 – Official opening for the public. Monday, March 17 and Tuesday, March 18 – for students Grades 4-6. Two sessions each day, either 9:15 - 11:00 a.m. or 12:15 - 2:00 p.m. Space is limited. Classes will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. For more information or to book your visit, please contact the event co-ordinator, Lloydetta Quaicoe, quaicoe@gmail.com.

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRACTICAL STUDY OF LAW IN EDUCATION (CAPSLE) ANNUAL CONFERENCE

April 20-22, 2008

Halifax, NS. Theme: *Educational Leadership Today and Tomorrow: The Law as Friend or Foe*. Further information: www.capsle.ca.

SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONFERENCE

May 13-14, 2008

Holiday Inn, St.John's. The Newfoundland & Labrador Sexual Health Centre will be having the first ever conference on Sexual Health held in this province. For further information contact Karen Moores, Conference Coordinator, Tel: 709-579-1009; email: Karen.m@nlsexualhealthcentre.org.

Dates to Remember

November 2007

Nov 15 **Department Deadline:** Teacher Exchange applications to Australia, Britain and USA

Nov 22-23 Pre-Retirement Seminar, St. John's

Nov 29-30 Pre-Retirement Seminar, St. John's

December 2007

Dec. 6-7 Pre-Retirement Seminar, St. John's

Dec 15 **Department Deadline:** Teacher Exchange applications to Ontario

January 2008

Jan 15 **Deadline:** 2008 Christmas Card Contest entries

Jan 15 **Deadline:** Receipt of Barnes, Bancroft, Allan Bishop, and Special Recognition Award Nominations at the NLTA office

Jan 17 **Deadline:** Professional Development Fund applications

Jan 18-19 NLTA Executive Meeting

February 2008

Feb 1 **Deadline:** Applications for Educational Leave – teachers must make prior application to school board

Feb 14 Janeway Day in the Schools

March 2008

Mar 2-8 Education Week

Mar 20 **Deadline:** Professional Development Fund applications

Mar 31 **Board Deadline:** Notice for retirement at end of school year

Mar 31 **Deadline:** Centennial Study Award Applications

Mar 31 **Deadline** (on or before March 31): International Conference Presenters Program Applications

Funny You Should Ask!

Do you have a humorous story, joke or anecdote about your life as a teacher that you would like to share with readers? This could be something that occurred in the classroom, overheard comments from students or teachers, or just a funny incident that happened to you while at school. We would love to print it in *The Bulletin*. If selected to be printed we will send you an NLTA gift package.

All submissions should be in good taste and may be edited for content.

Please forward submissions to:
Lesley-Ann Browne
Editor, *The Bulletin*
labrowne@nlta.nl.ca

Important Notice for New Teachers

New Teacher Kits

If you HAVE NOT yet received your NLTA New Teacher Kit, please contact:

Susan Cardoulis
Newfoundland & Labrador Teachers' Association
3 Kenmount Road
St. John's, NL, A1B 1W1
Tel: 726-3223, ext. 246 or 1-800-563-3599 (toll free)
scardoulis@nlta.nl.ca